



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

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## **EARLY LEAD POISONING DETECTION PROGRAM HAS DRAMATIC EFFECT** *San Diego County Program Results in Fewer Cases of Poisoning*

There has been a dramatic drop in the number of San Diego county children suffering from severe lead poisoning in recent years thanks to a comprehensive effort to provide services earlier to lead-poisoned children and to eliminate sources of lead exposure.

The County's Health and Human Services Agency's (HHSA) Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program began an early prevention initiative in 2004 to provide services to children with lower lead levels. Since then, the number of children with elevated levels of lead in their blood has decreased by 61 percent. The only sure way to know a child is lead poisoned is to have the child tested. More than 49,000 children in San Diego County were tested in 2009.

"Early detection of lead poisoning is critical," said Supervisor Ron Roberts, District 4, San Diego County Board of Supervisors. "Lead is a silent attacker that can cause severe developmental problems in children and chronic exposure to even low levels of lead can have serious consequences."

In 2004, when the early lead poisoning prevention program began, 54 San Diego County children were found to have elevated blood lead levels (15 micrograms or more of lead per deciliter of blood). That number has plummeted to 21 in 2009; a 61 percent drop. The highest number of children affected was in 1996 when 102 had elevated levels of lead.

"Lead poisoning is preventable," said Nick Macchione, Director of HHSA. "Many people have the perception that the danger of lead poisoning has gone away since the lead in paint was removed beginning in 1979. But some San Diego County residents live in housing built prior to that year and paint is still the number one source of lead poisoning in our children, followed by home remedies and pottery."

Nearly a quarter of a million children living in the United States have blood lead levels high enough to cause significant damage to their health, estimates the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), based on data from a 2003–2004 national survey.

Parents can reduce a child's exposure to lead in many ways, said Leticia Ayala, Associate Director for Programs, Environmental Health Coalition. "Parents should always request a lead inspection before buying an older home, and have their children tested for lead poisoning, even if they appear healthy. Prevention and precaution are the best tools for keeping children healthy."

For more information about lead poisoning, visit [www.sdlead.org](http://www.sdlead.org) or call 619-515-6694.

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